

CORRESPONDENCE

Population Problems

To the Editor, Eugenics Review

SIR,—Referring to Volpar, you say (January 1939, p. 234) that "it requires little imagination to predict some of the eugenic consequences which may follow the discovery of the first contraceptive that can be used effectively by the meanest intelligence." Please clarify the eugenics movement by predicting some of them.

You say (p. 236): "Not so very long ago experts were maintaining that the main problem was the prevention of pressure of population on the means of production." Surely it is still the world's main problem. The world's inhabitants still have a birth-rate of over 3 *per centum*; so they would require to increase their food supply at the prodigious rate of 2 *per centum* a year, to provide really enough for all. I hotly deny that "industrial progress" has made it possible to have a high birth-rate without pressure on the means of subsistence—that is, without widespread under-nutrition.

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To the Editor, Eugenics Review

SIR,—In your issue of January (p. 293), Mr. D. V. Glass, speaking of the Law of Diminishing Returns, says:

"The present view of economists is that this 'law' is a purely technological one, expressing what would happen at a point of time if variable quantities of one factor were applied to fixed quantities of another factor. It has no relation to what would happen over a period of time, and clearly we might have historically increasing returns while the 'law' was true of any point of time in the period."

The Law of Diminishing Returns, regarding which there is a large and highly scientific literature, was stated by Liebig as follows:

"It is easily understood that the increase in the yield of a field cannot be proportional to the labour applied to the field, but that it rises at a far smaller rate."

That is an eternal truth, which is entirely unaffected by scientific discoveries.

Mr. Glass, however, like many economists, seems to think that this law may be neutralized by discoveries in agriculture, so that a larger amount of labour applied to the field at a later date may produce proportionally more than a smaller amount would have done at an earlier date.

There is little ground for that belief. Agriculture, as distinct from farm machinery, is now a very unprogressive science. A hundred years ago the average output of wheat per acre in this country was 31 bushels (Mulhall's *Dictionary of Statistics*, p. 14). To-day it is 32.

In his presidential address to the Statistical Society in 1922, Sir Henry Rew said:

"Within the past thirty years not only have agricultural stations and colleges been established but many millions of public and private money have been spent in promoting agricultural educational research. The result of this expenditure cannot be said to be very apparent in the statistical record of output."

The great majority of mankind live in countries where there is very little cultivable land per head and what there is must be cultivated very intensively. In such countries the Law of Diminishing Returns is felt in its full force. The Japanese are the most skilled farmers in the world. Their output per acre per annum far exceeds that of any European country. Yet their output per man is deplorably low. The result is that while in New Zealand the consumption of milk per head per annum is 127 gallons, in Japan it is less than a gallon. The Japanese consume one kilogram of beef per head per annum. The New Zealanders consume sixty-one.

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* * * These letters are referred to in "Notes to the Quarter."

Athletics and other forms of ability

To the Editor, Eugenics Review

SIR,—I have ascertained in the cases of several families that athletic skill is apt to succeed distinction in other fields among the ancestry. A notable instance has recently occurred among the players in the recent match at squash rackets between English and American women, five a side, which was won by the English without the loss of a single game. Three of the five English ladies belonged to notable families. The Hon. Anne Lytton-Milbank is great-grand-daughter of Lord Lytton, novelist, grand-daughter of Lord Lytton, Viceroy, and great-great-grand-daughter of Byron; she has also many other relatives of note. Lady Katherine Cairns is grand-daughter of a Lord Chancellor, the 1st Earl Cairns, while Miss Susan Noel is great-grand-daughter of a Fellow of the Royal Society, and is descended from Lord Barham, First Lord of the Admiralty at the time of the battle of Trafalgar.

Immediate descent of purely athletic ability is also evidenced by the fact that Miss Lytton-Milbanke's father was at one time champion "real" tennis, while Miss Noel's father and brother, Lady Katherine's father and her maternal uncle, Mr. P. W. Cobbold, represented their schools in the Public Schools Rackets Competition.

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